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ABRAHAM LINCOLN—A TRIBUTE

REMARKS

OF

WILLIAM J. GRAHAM

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE

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REMARKS
OF
HON. WILLIAM J. GRAHAM,
OF ILLINOIS.

Mr. GRAHAM of Illinois. Mr. Speaker and Members of the House, 109 years ago to-day one of the world's greatest characters was born. A little shanty in the backwoods of Kentucky was his birthplace. Want was his godmother. Obscurity was his by inheritance. No pride and ceremony attended his humble birth. The lonely voices of the wilderness sang his only lullaby. The little family and the great outdoors and the mystic heart of nature, and that was all—and so was born Abraham Lincoln. Back toward antiquity stretches the path that mankind has followed. Here and there along the course stand mileposts to mark the way. Such an one was Abraham Lincoln. No other man of our race has so left his impress upon the world as he. No other man of our people has been so much of an inspiration to fairness and justice and national morality. Universal reverence attends his memory, an affectionate reverence shared, I may say, by many who remember with heartfelt pride and affection their fathers who fought against him in the conflict. [Applause.] He came of a stalwart race. He was descended from one of those stiff-necked English breeds that fled to the American wilds because they would not submit to an odious and hateful Government. The blood that was in him was the blood of the pioneer and the freethinker. His humble surroundings, the poverty and meagerness of his childhood days, his struggles with adversity, were the contributing causes that led to a firm and resolute character. The mighty forests, as yet unaltered by the woodman's ax, the untracked wilderness of the prairies, the sweeping currents of mighty rivers as they flowed through the virgin country to the sea, bred constancy and devotion and humanity and good common sense.

The times were ripe for a character of heroic mold. For 40 years this people had been trying to avoid the issue. Compromise and artifice and subterfuge had delayed the coming of the decision. Every statesman of the period had exercised his talent and wisdom to contrive some way the trial by fire might not be necessary. Washington and Jefferson dimly saw the crisis ahead of them. Jackson sensed it. Henry Clay saw its ominous shadow and by his talents avoided it for the time. Daniel Webster foresaw it. Stephen A. Douglas attempted again to postpone it. But it was coming, as every moral issue will come to a people in its time. A postponement, a palliation, simply brings in the end a greater weight of misery and catastrophe. Abraham Lincoln grew up in this atmosphere. The blood that was in him, the training of his early life, had inclined

him to follow not the beaten paths of thought, but, with logic and directness, to press forward directly to the object to be attained. Thus out of the welter and maze of political thought and the shifting scenes of the times suddenly he stepped out as the champion of a strong, indissoluble Federal union, a nationalist, and became at once, as has been so aptly said of him by Henry Watterson, "the incarnation of the brain and soul of the Union." In a driving storm of political controversies, with the columns of the temple already toppling about him, he was chosen by the people as their Chief Magistrate.

The labors that confronted Abraham Lincoln were Herculean. The problems that had to be solved were problems that had never before been propounded nor had solution. He must create an army and navy out of nothing; he must rehabilitate the credit of the country and finance a war while the Treasury was empty and the people divided.

We of the present generation are engaged in the greatest war in history. Back through the dusty chronicles of the human race we read of the death and desolation of a thousand wars. Painfully and slowly, through blood and treasure and tears, has our race ascended from savagery. But in all the annals of man, there never before has been a contest when all the world was whelmed in the conflict. We have taken our stand in this struggle. We stand for right and justice and human liberty. As one man we take up our weapons and bare our breasts for the struggle that we would forbear, if we could, and yet, in the sight of God, and for the rights of free peoples, we dare not. We speak as one man. We have no divided counsels among us. The giant is girding on his armor; at the ruddy forge he shapes his sword. Woe to tyrants when he strikes! [Applause.]

But how different was the position of Abraham Lincoln. Solitary and alone he stood; the confederation of our fathers, the Union of States, was about to dissolve into its constituent elements. There was a great sentiment in the country favorable to his ideas, but he must consolidate and crystallize it and make of it a concrete force. He was denounced and upbraided in the House of Representatives. He was besieged by hordes of office-seekers, caring not so much for the preservation of the Union as for political perquisites. He was made the butt of every cartoonist. He was maligned and slandered by a thousand papers, not alone in the South but in the North as well. Horace Greeley, in the New York Tribune, thundered, "On to Richmond! On to Richmond!" and forced the catastrophe of Bull Run. "Let the erring sisters depart in peace," cried Greeley in every home in the North. "Save our boys; let us have peace. peace at any price," came from all sides. A storm of criticism descended upon him at every failure, at every check, and at every new sacrifice. Viewing the matter from the perspective of over half a century, we know how unjust such criticism is. Criticism should never be offered in time of war, unless it be constructive criticism, and such as may aid in the contest with the common enemy. By all this, the great, gentle spirit of Lincoln was troubled, but not shaken. He had but one goal ahead of him, and that the preservation of the Union. With unremitting zeal and serene confidence he went forward with his eyes upon this goal.

There were many who assailed his acts as unconstitutional. The calls for volunteers, the suspension of the writ of habeas

corpus, the draft, and almost every other Executive act were denounced as violations of the fundamental law of the land. A profound believer in the maintenance of constitutional forms, he yet had ever before his eyes a higher object—the maintenance of the Union. If the Union were in danger, the constitutional forms must yield to the higher necessity. And so it should ever be. Constitutions are but the machinery men create to preserve established government, and if by human error the Constitution will not provide safety for a free people in extremity, then surely the safety of the people must be first provided for, and the people may be trusted to correct the constitutional error when the storm is passed and the State secure. Abraham Lincoln no doubt thought, when this storm of criticism broke about him—and I commend this thought to those critics to-day who continually decry the unconstitutionality of the measures we are taking for the Nation's safety—that it is better to have a country without a Constitution than to have a Constitution without a country. [Applause.]

When Abraham Lincoln took his seat he was confronted by chaos. The Treasury was bankrupt. On four occasions between Lincoln's election and his inauguration President Buchanan negotiated loans to pay the running expenses of the Government. The Regular Army consisted only of about 18,000 men, poorly equipped, scattered over the country. There were few munitions and supplies for an army in the country. The Southern States were in arms, led by resolute and talented leaders. A considerable element in the North was openly hostile to him. France and England were unfriendly. Of temporal power he had none. There was but one thing he could do, and he did it. With simple confidence in the cause he espoused, with serene faith and unflinching trust he cried out to his people, "Come and help me, the Union must be preserved." [Applause.] And then they came, from the farm, from the forge, from the pulpit, and from the plow, the mighty Volunteer Army of 1860 to 1865. And just across the line the martial drum was calling, calling to the men of the Southland. And out of the North and up from the South came the flower of youth and chivalry and strength. There were the waving of bright flags, and the show of brave men, and the pomp and panoply of war; and then four cruel, bloody, desolate years; back and forth across the continent struggled the lines of blue and the lines of gray. Four sad and bitter years. But at the end there came a day when the roll of drums was dead and the clash of arms and tumult died as a storm that fades in the far-off sky. Then a breeze came from the sea, and it shook out the folds of one flag and it waved over all the land, a symbol of the Union of a mighty people, which, please God, shall endure. [Applause.]

This contest called for the best blood of our land. Each State gave the best it had. I know I may be pardoned if I allude, with just pride, to the illustrious sons of my beloved Illinois—Palmer, and Logan, and Ulysses S. Grant. And some States gave to both. Virginia, the mother of Presidents, gave to the lost cause Robert E. Lee, the plumed knight of the Confederacy, and Jackson, he that stood like a stone wall; and to the Union she gave Scott and Samuel Phillips Lee, he who led the line

with his ship, when Farragut roared from the rigging, "Never mind the torpedoes, go ahead," and Thomas, the Rock of Chickamauga. To-day, as with high emprise we strike for democracy and the right to live and be free, God grant that among our men under the Nation's flag, over there across the seas, there is another Grant, another Lee, another Thomas, another Stonewall Jackson. [Applause.] In this day of days, O Ruler of the destinies of nations, give us great leaders, for our cause is just, and must prevail! [Applause.]

In these latter days we are apt to forget our experiences and our necessities caused by the Civil War. President Lincoln freely asked and freely received great powers from Congress. He was authorized to use the Army and Navy as he thought fit; ample sums were voted to him to expend at his pleasure. He was authorized to take possession of and operate all the railroad and telegraph lines of the country, to impress their employees into the military service, to fix the compensation of the owners through a commission appointed by himself, and retain them as long as necessary. Under this act he did take possession of and operate 2,105 miles of railroad, located in 11 States, and built 641 miles of new road. He was authorized to call from the States all men between the ages of 18 and 45 as militia when he chose and to suspend the writ of habeas corpus whenever and wherever he desired. A draft act was passed giving broader powers than our present selective-draft act does. Thirteen loans were authorized by Congress at his suggestion, totaling approximately \$2,500,000,000.

To me the most remarkable phase of Abraham Lincoln's life was the constructive side. He was a builder. Even in times of greatest stress, when the continuance of our institutions was being tried before the supreme court of the people, he was building for the future. In the very beginning of his administration he called to his side the strongest men and best counselors he might obtain in the land, irrespective of political complexion. To illustrate this, Edwin M. Stanton was in Washington criticizing the conduct of the war with fury and scorn and condemning the President as an "imbecile" when he was called to the Cabinet as Secretary of War. This was the same man who stood with bowed head and tear-wet face as the great spirit went out, and said in his anguish, "Now he is with the ages." The great war President called these men around him for constructive purposes, that, while destructive forces for the time held sway, they might not be permitted to disturb the foundations of national prosperity, greatness, and strength after that struggle was concluded. War is a degenerating process, and that nation is doubly wise that looks ahead to the period when the war shall end and shields and protects and defends its economic strength for that day. Abraham Lincoln did this thing. He had vision. He could see, through rifts in the clouds of war, the sun of prosperity shining and an era of economical and moral greatness dawning for the reunited Nation. A casual inspection of the legislation enacted during the Civil War illustrates this. A system of high and protective import tariffs was devised, a system that produced great revenues and developed the industrial resources of the country; the building of railroads across the country was induced by favorable land grants; the great homestead laws were enacted that developed

the West and made an empire west of the Mississippi; national banks and banking were inaugurated. These and many other constructive measures were enacted and put into operation. While the war had been an immense drain upon the resources of the country, the constructive statesmanship of Abraham Lincoln and his Cabinet had so conducted the affairs of the Nation that at the close of the struggle this Nation stood on the firmest and most secure economic and financial foundation that it had occupied since the formation of the Government.

A war that teaches a people efficiency and economy and nationalism may not be an unmixed evil, but a war that destroys industry and tears down the foundations of economic greatness is a disaster. If anything is to be concluded from the history of the legislation I have briefly detailed, it is that while it is axiomatic that in times of peace we should prepare for war, it is doubly true that in times of war we should prepare for peace. [Applause.]

The war of the States passed, like an ugly dream. Then the Nation turned to bind up its wounds and prepare for the hopeful future. To those who pressed him for vengeance and punishment Abraham Lincoln turned smilingly and said in his homely phrase: "Let them come home." Had he lived, there would have been no reconstruction days, no Ku-Klux Klans. [Applause.] When the hand of a crazed and misguided fanatic struck him down, there died at once the savior of the Union and one of the best friends the South ever had. [Applause.]

A sorrowing people bore him home and buried him in the great prairies of his own Illinois, to rest there until the trump shall sound and time shall end. And his very ashes, so lying there, are a constant inspiration to every son of Illinois, aye, to every son of America, as the years go by, to stand for truth and justice and humanity. A thousand years may come and go; the snows of a thousand winters may fall upon his lowly resting place; the summer sun may awaken into smiling gladness the flowers that spring by his grave as the centuries pass; the stately granite above him may crumble and decay, but while men live and go their way Abraham Lincoln lives; his great, kindly, sympathetic heart finds answering throbs in the breasts of his beloved people. [Applause.]

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